

Comprehensive Treatment Area 3:  
Riverside Gateway



Feasibility Study and Treatment Plan

Cabinet Office

11<sup>th</sup> August 2021

## Site Context

CTA 3 is situated in a Riverside and Harbour location with easy access to the following key destinations within Douglas:-

- Douglas Railway Station, providing rail links to Castletown, Port Erin and the south of the Island
- Douglas Yacht Club and the Marina (to the north & east of the CTA);
- North Quay and Bridge Road, with its established day/evening offer of eateries and pubs facing the Marina (to the north & east);
- Tesco Supermarket (adjacent to the eastern boundary of the CTA)
- Athol Street and the wider business district (to the north of the CTA), and
- The National Sports Centre is within a 1km distance, as the crow flies (to the west of the CTA).

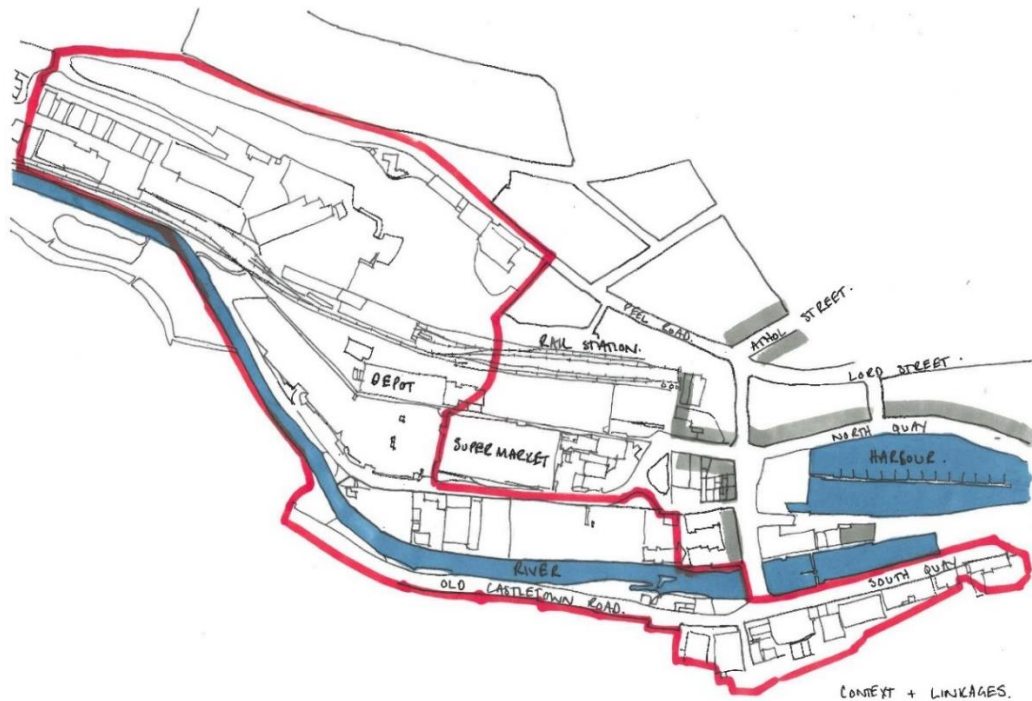


Figure 1: Illustrative Plan to show site context and linkages

## Historic Townscape Evolution

Historic land uses in this area have been defined by the close proximity to the Harbour, The Nunnery, and the Steam Railway.

The 1869 Map evidences the Douglas River meandering around The Nunnery before flowing around the site of the rope walk prior to reaching the harbour. The rope walk that supplied ropes to the fishing industry was an industrial facility that supported the Island's herring fisheries. Historical maps also show private woodland, which suggests a historical link to the Nunnery Estate (the Mansion House was built in 1823 but activity on the site dates back centuries).

To accommodate the new railway line, the river was straightened before passing over a series of weirs and entering the harbour. The station first opened in 1873 and trains served passengers on now disused lines to Peel and Ramsey. The new railway - in close proximity of the river - afforded industrial opportunities that could take advantage of steam power. By the 1960's, despite Douglas' relative decline as a fishing port, the south quay was home to a significantly large timber yard and saw mill; many workshops and facilities that ran the length of Lake Road on both the north and south sides. The former Lake Timber Yard site (North of Lake Road) has now been redeveloped as a supermarket site, whilst the former saw mill (south of Lake Road) is partially demolished, but derelict buildings associated with the former saw mill use are still evident on site. Industrial units at Hills Meadow appear on the 1960 Ordnance Survey map and today the industrial estate comprises units occupied by a variety of uses.

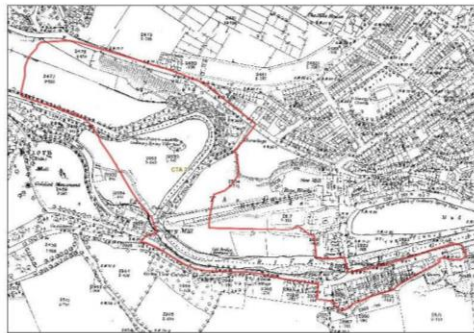


Figure 2: Terrace of properties on the South Quay with the old stone bridge (iMuseum)

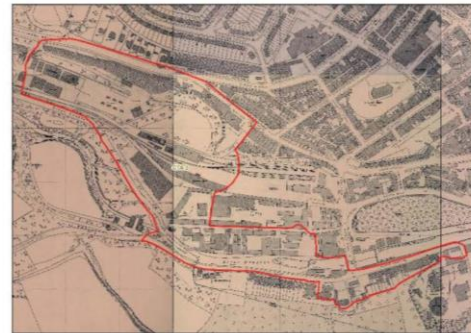
### Historic Townscape Evolution (cont.....)

South Quay has a long history of residential development, as evidenced in the 1869 Ordnance Survey map. A historic terrace of housing on South Quay is pictured below. The majority of the residential properties have long been demolished and industrial units now occupy this area. Arch Tower House is the last remaining property on what was once Archway Road, and is now a Registered Building.

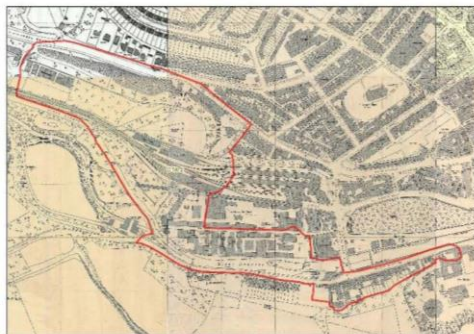
Historic maps illustrate in plan form the evolution of the built form within the CTA. The plans clearly show how significantly the railway influenced industrial development in this area, forming an industrial core that complemented the fishing industry associated with the harbour. With the decline of the steam and rail industries, some previously developed industrial sites within this CTA have become redundant.



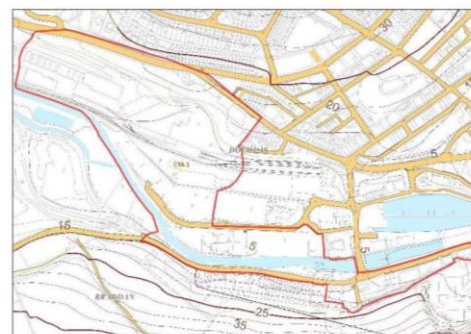
1869 Plan



1980 Plan



1960 Plan



Present Day Plan

Fig. 3: Historic and current Maps



## Land Uses

Existing land uses within the CTA broadly follow the historic land use designations within the Douglas Local Plan 1998 (now superseded) but the Area Plan recognises it as mainly falling in Mixed use area 8(a) although it does extend into Mixed Use Area 4 and 7 there is a small area of residential (undeveloped) in the south eastern spur.

The light industrial area noted alongside Peel Road on the 1998 plan is now a new public sector flat scheme and the other light industrial area (as was) at Hills Meadow has extended eastwards. Other uses currently on the ground include a section of the railway line, the bus depot/associated office, a petrol garage adjacent to Peel Road, a mix of uses on south quay and the car parking associated with Tesco.

The last 20 years has seen new developments taking advantage of the Marina development and public realm improvements/traffic management and calming measures in the wider area; one notable development being Quay West which replaced a former garage. Whilst the 1998 Local Plan identified land adjacent to the river as 'predominantly residential', this did not materialise. The Lake Road site now forms a gap site adjacent to the river. Leisure use has recently emerged on South Quay, showing a further move away from trade supplier shops and light industry and there is scope for further diversification and intensification on South Quay in the future, subject to proper assessment.

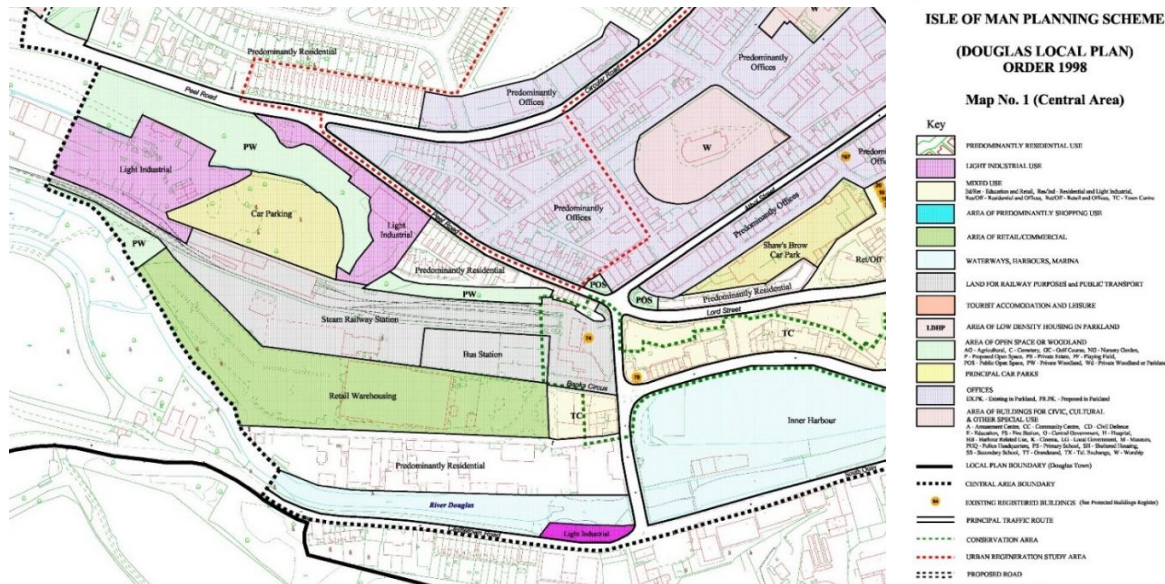


Fig. 4: Extract from the Douglas Local Plan Map 1 (1998)

## Urban Block Form

Development in this area is coarsely grained, with large floor plate industrial and commercial buildings designed for functionality and security. This results in introverted developments that present no active frontage onto the street scene. With the exception of Arch Tower (RB 217), there is little in the way of architectural merit evident within the CTA. The lack of fronts and backs to existing buildings erodes the perception of an urban block form.

On closer inspection, there is a block form apparent, but its character differs from the more compact block forms evident outside of the CTA area. Long and thin blocks occur near the river and harbour, accessed via the street. Hills Meadow Industrial estate is situated within a large, elongated block. The urban block form has been defined by the railway line, the river, steep topography, and access requirements to the harbour steeply sloping ground steps down from its highest point on Peel Road to the river in the south of the CTA area. Similarly, steeply rising topography associated with the headland constrains the urban block form to the south of South Quay.

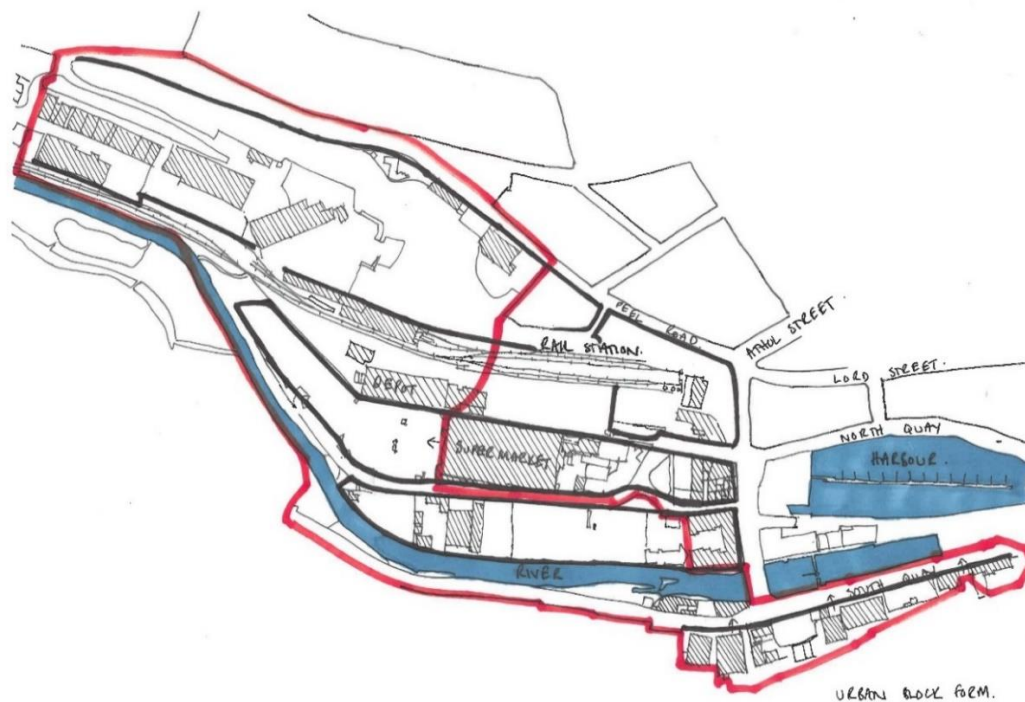


Figure 5: Illustrative Plan to show urban block form

## Levels and Site Access

The railway line and abrupt change in levels sever the CTA across its mid-section which makes it awkward to connect this area to the surrounding townscape. The Douglas River skirts the southern boundary and lack of public access across it also adds to the impression of disconnection. These are immovable characteristics. When combined with the existing land uses within the CTA both access to the CTA and across it is significantly restricted. The steep topography is somewhat disguised by mature wooded areas alongside Peel Road, extending down to the Railway, and whilst this area forms a visual asset, level changes are a real complication for future development in this area. This can be starkly appreciated when viewing the rear of Railway Terrace from the railway platforms. These characteristics were one of the key reasons it was given CTA status in the Area Plan; levels and access were clearly major issues but this area is nonetheless close to the town centre and links in and out of this area are important.

Land uses on the lower half, close to the river, are accessed over Douglas Bridge and from Bank Hill; namely the railway station, Tesco supermarket, bus depot and former redundant industrial site (DM002g). There is one access point into Hills Meadow Industrial Estate from Peel Road.

Highways capacity on Bridge Road is likely to be a significant constraint for future development in this area, and future development would need to either minimise traffic levels, through careful selection of land uses or bear significant costs to overcome the site constraints to overcome the highways capacity issues. Achieving access over the Douglas River from Site DM002 (in some form) has always been a goal and forms part of Mixed Use Proposal 8a as does the need for a highway impact assessment.

South Quay plots are accessed on street, making these sites much more easily developable and responsive to market demand than other sites within the CTA. Ground levels adjacent to the River have been built up and retained with retaining structures. Any schemes for future development should assess these retaining walls for structural soundness. Historic infill materials in this area should be assessed, given the location adjacent to the River.

Levels and Site Access (cont...)

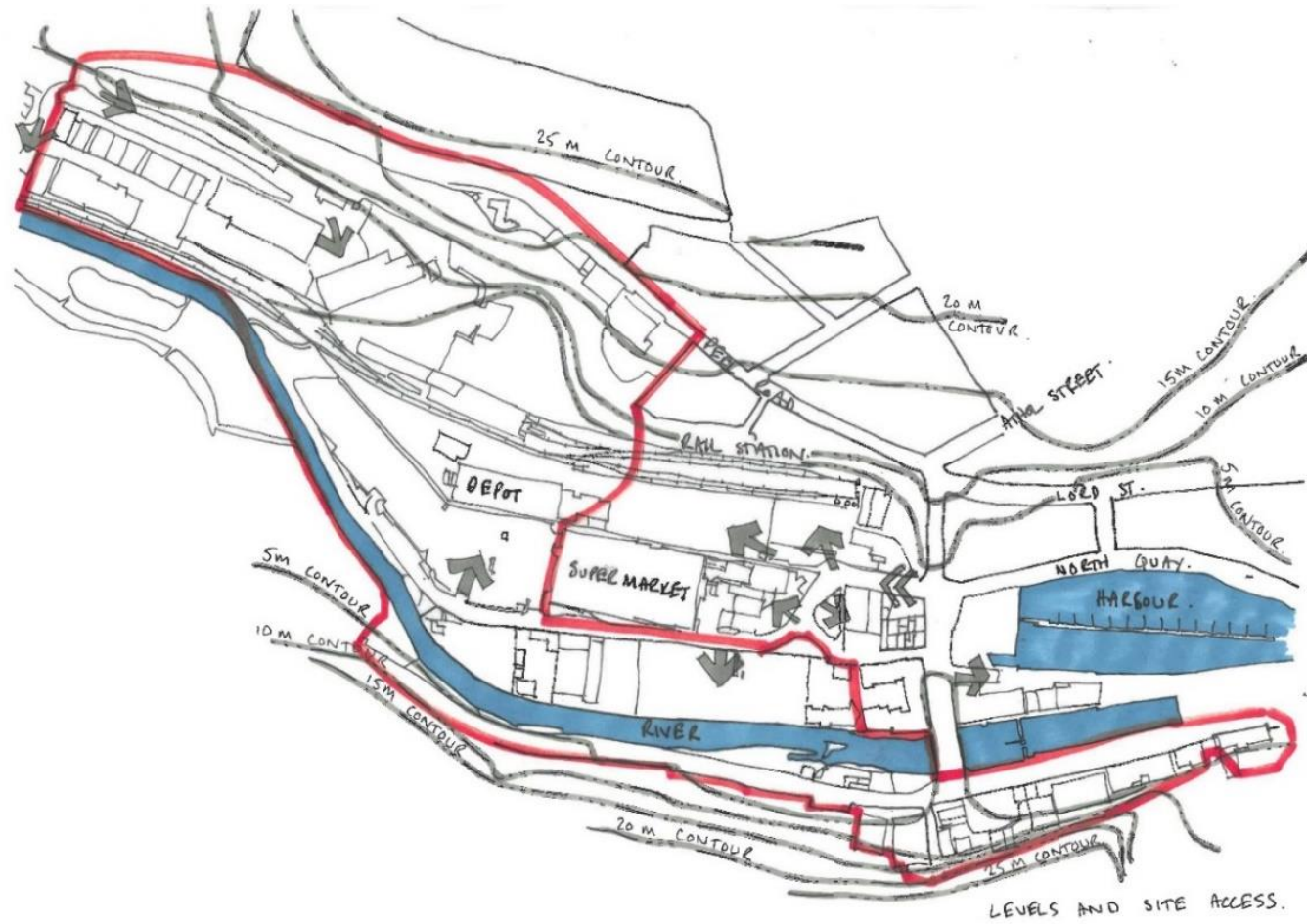


Figure 6: Illustrative Plan to show site contours and access



## Vehicular and Pedestrian Permeability

The River and rail track sever the area, and there is only one crossing point within CTA 3, across the Bridge on Bridge Road. Topographic levels further reduce permeability to the surrounding townscape. Consequently, three movement nodes on a north to south axis are evident, extending from Douglas Bridge/Bridge Road to the junction of Bank Hill/Athol Street/Lord Street. Long vehicular access roads follow existing contours at lower levels within the flood plain, deterring pedestrian use due to their length and lack of through routes. Level access is available for both pedestrians and vehicles adjacent to the river and harbour, with North Quay becoming pedestrianised during evening hours. An additional crossing point across the River would help to alleviate existing conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles at key movement nodes, and break up existing street lengths.

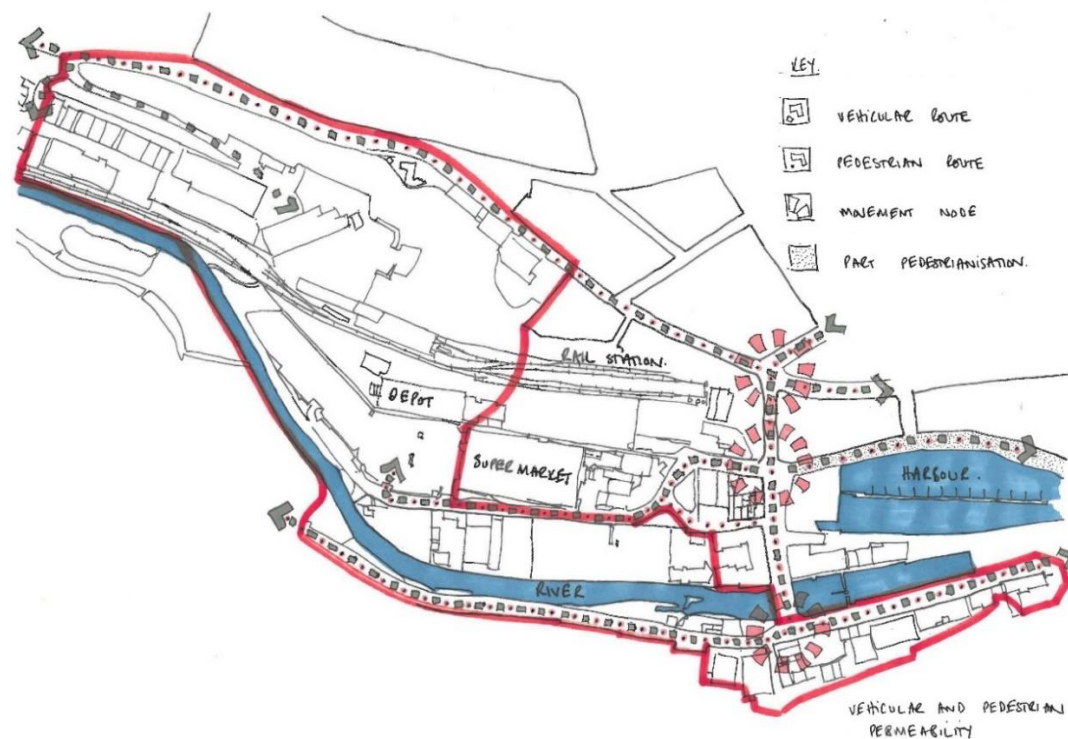


Figure 7: Illustrative Plan to show vehicular and pedestrian permeability

## Environmental Constraints

The area is situated within a high risk river and tidal flood zone, as shown in blue and green respectively on the map extract below. The flood risk will form a major constraint to redevelopment in this area, and full flood risk assessment will be required for any future planning applications. The area would benefit from a flood risk management strategy, but innovative solutions can help to resolve this environmental constraint, and make for an interesting quarter. This may involve significant drainage works, which could sterilise some parts in this CTA. It is worth noting that flood alleviation measures have the potential to create attractive and useable public open space in this area, whilst mitigating future flood risk. This land use, used in combination with other land uses, should not be discounted.

Given the proliferation of previous industrial uses on the site, there is the very real risk of contamination in the ground. The existence and extent of contamination will need to be identified as part of any future Planning Applications.

It should be noted that none of the CTA falls within a conservation area boundary, although Douglas North Quay conservation area is situated to the east of the CTA. Arch Tower, situated on South Quay and visible on approach from Bridge Road, is the only registered building in CTA 3 (RB No. 217).

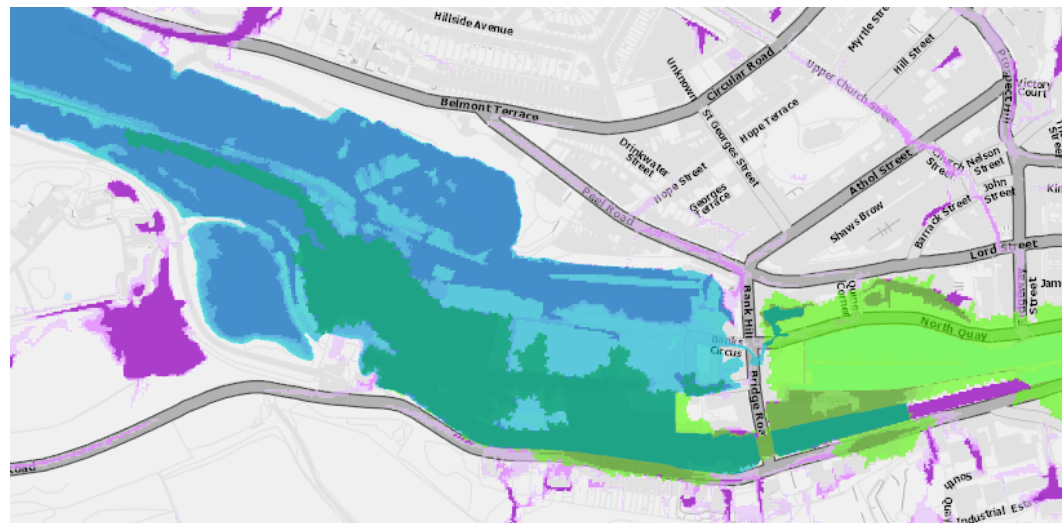


Fig. 8: Extract from the Flood Risk Viewer Map to illustrate flooding risk

## Environmental Constraints (cont..)

A Registered Trees Area (Registration ref. DG10) is situated within the Hills Meadow Estate. The eastern area also forms part of the setting to Douglas Railway Station, which is a Registered Building. A second area of Registered Trees is located adjacent to the Old Castletown Road, by the River (Registration ref. DG02). The figure below shows the extent of the Registered Tree area that lies within the CTA and alongside it. These trees form a significant area of green infrastructure and provide an attractive setting to CTA 3. They also provide good natural screening between Peel Road and the Hills Meadow Industrial Estate, with wider tree coverage encircling almost all of the estate.

Manx National Heritage should also be consulted, in order to determine areas of archaeological interest.

Any future development in this area would need to take account of these environmental constraints.

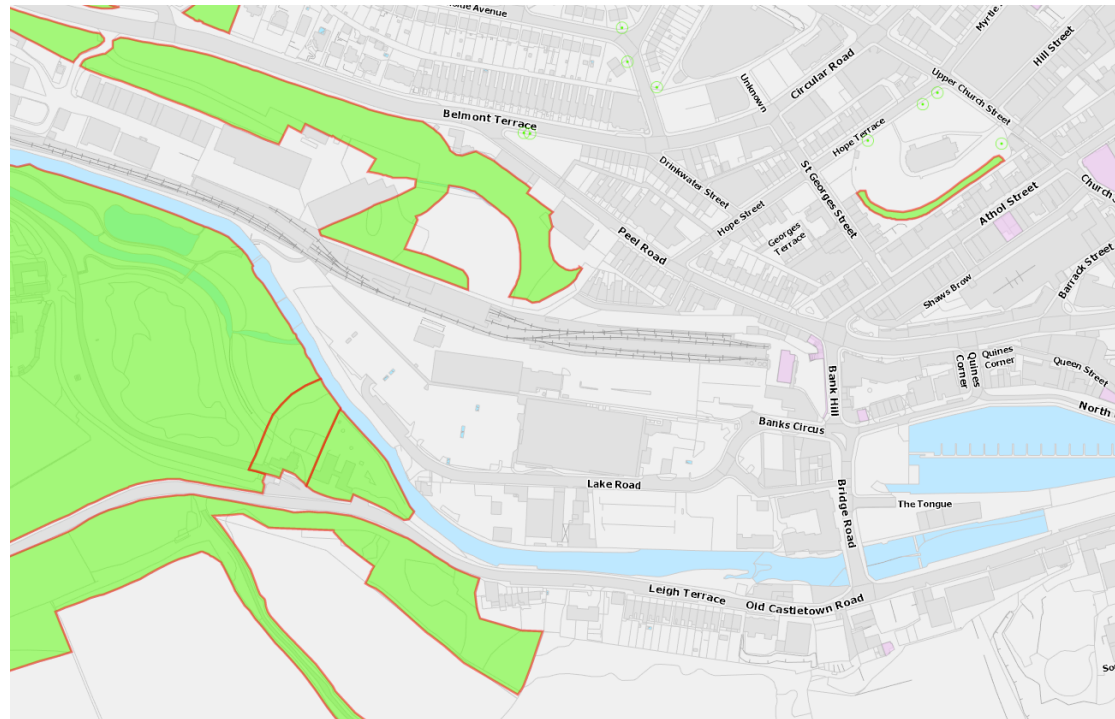


Figure 9: Illustrative Plan to show registered tree areas and Registered Buildings

## Visual Assets and Detractors

The riverside location and verdant woodland setting are significant visual assets for this area.

Views out of the CTA towards the historic rail station area also serve as an asset to this site, as are views of the marina and North Quay, when viewed from the South Quay.

The service yard associated with the supermarket and large areas of surface car parking form significant visual detractors to the area, diminishing the attributes associated with this riverside location. High fencing has been installed around the car parking opposite Tesco's service yard but does little to enhance the area.

There are a number of redundant buildings which remain in-situ. These do detract from the area, particularly when viewed on approach from the west along Castletown Road.



Fig. 10: River and woodland setting, as viewed from the Old Bridge



Visual Assets and Detractors (cont....)



Fig. 11: Douglas Railway Station



Fig. 12: Douglas North Quay during the evening

Visual Assets and Detractors (cont....)



Fig. 13: Looking north towards the railway station and car park



Fig. 14: Looking from Lake Road towards the railway station

## Utilities Provision and Waste Storage

Observations on site would suggest that utilities and infrastructure provision for existing buildings within CTA 3 is accessed via the surrounding road and pavement layout. Installation of utilities is likely to have taken place some time ago. Given the growth of Douglas in the intervening period, there may be capacity issues. Further to this, existing drainage may not be sufficient to cope with flooding. A full assessment of utilities provision is recommended, to better understand the relevant constraints in this respect.

Due to the type of uses in this CTA area, waste storage, is contained within available service yards. However, as this area begins to regenerate, waste storage should be integral to design schemes and discretely located, to avoid unsightly waste storage on street and in view.

## Relevant Planning Considerations

CTA 3 is situated within a Mixed Use Proposal Area (8a) for the Riverside Gateway<sup>1</sup>. The broad extent of CTA 3 is denoted as an orange diagonal hatch on the map extract below. Earlier sections demonstrate how the area forms an important western gateway to Douglas. Land uses step northwards - in banded fashion - north of the river starting with the redundant buildings and car parking, then Tesco, then the bus depot, the railway and then Hills Meadow industrial estate. The only CTA element south of the river is South Quay which is different in character and divided into multiple plots.

The potential in this area was recognised in the Area Plan in Chapter 9 – Town Centres. There are sizeable vacant/redundant/underused sites situated within this CTA that, if sensitively developed and/or improved, could help to resolve connectivity issues and flooding issues, including a bridge link, potentially leading to an improved active travel and leisure route between the 'shared' space on North Quay to The Nunnery footpath.

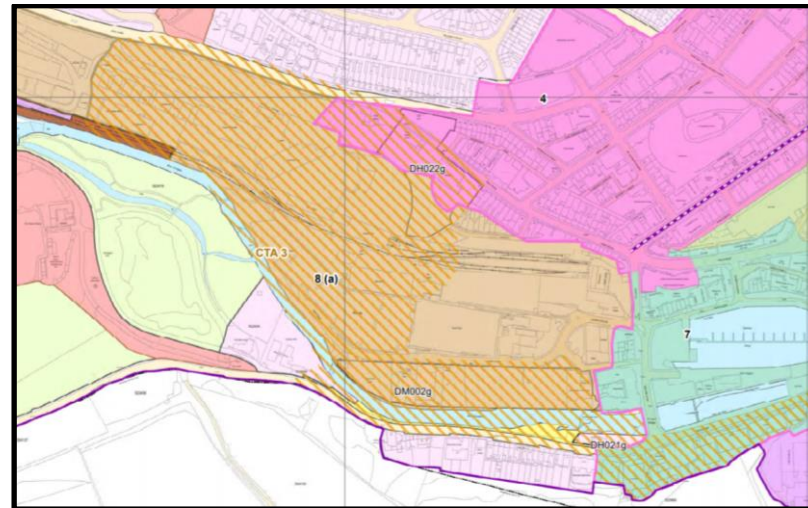


Figure 15 – Extract from Map 5: Douglas Central Map - Area Plan for the East

<sup>1</sup> A significant portion of CTA 3 falls within the boundary extent for the Central Douglas Masterplan 2014. It is included within the character area of The Riverside Gateway.



## Relevant Planning Considerations (cont....)

This area, adjacent to the town centre, presents an opportunity to accommodate changing and evolving leisure time pursuits. The Area Plan for the East supports a continuation of existing uses in the short to medium term, with potential comprehensive development in the longer term for bulky retail, leisure activities, and residential purposes and office uses where specified. In respect of the Unoccupied Urban Sites Register, UU Site 5 (South Quay) and UU Site 16 (Land at Lake Road) falls within CTA 3.

The Area Plan for the East sets out a specific policy for this area, as below:

### ***Mixed Use Proposal 8a***

*There will be continued support for existing uses in the short-medium term. Consideration will be given to the comprehensive re-development of the area for leisure, retail warehouse (bulky goods), and residential uses. In respect of the area between Lake Road and the Douglas River (Site DM002g) a design scheme may include office development so long as it forms an integral part of a comprehensive scheme for the entire site which is properly master-planned. Proposals would be subject to a flood risk assessment and mitigation and a highway impact assessment which may require alternative access to the area including a bridge over the River Glass (sic)<sup>2</sup>. Comparison goods retailing will not generally be supported.*

A brief spatial analysis and policy intent for the Riverside area and Peel Road (East) is set out in paragraphs 13.9.1 and 13.9.2 of the Area Plan for the East, as detailed below:

- *This area comprises land to the south of Peel Road including part of Hills Meadow Industrial estate, land west of Railway Terrace and land to the south of Douglas Station including Lake Road and land to the north of the River Glass;*
- *The area is currently divided both by the railway lines and by differing site levels;*
- *The site provides an opportunity to improve linkages and thus circulation within and around Douglas which would allow for greater development opportunities that may currently be hindered by the capacity of the road network;*
- *The Riverside and Peel Road (East) CTA is also a strategic freight corridor and maintaining access for commercial vehicles, including HGV's, must be considered in any proposed development;*
- *The sites could provide for opportunities for development that have larger footprint requirements than some other town centre sites could offer, but there is also the ability to provide development at a higher density than at present, and*

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<sup>2</sup> Correct reference is Douglas River

## Relevant Planning Considerations (cont....)

- *The key to such sites will be improved access including as necessary a bridge over the railway linking the sites and a bridge over the River Glass plus flood mitigation. Any development should include improved pedestrian and cycleway links, particularly alongside the river.*

## Treatment Plan

A treatment plan for the Riverside area and Peel Road (East) is included within the Area Plan for the East, and is provided below for reference:

### *CTA Proposal 3 - Riverside and Peel Road (Treatment Plan)*

- *Development of this area could include leisure, retail warehouse (bulky goods) and residential uses. The acceptability of the range of uses and their precise location shall be assessed as part of a development brief taking into account accessibility, highway impact, design, visual impact and flood mitigation. The presence of buried river channels and 19th century water management channels such as mill leats may require carefully engineered groundworks. Provision for a cycle route that links to existing and future cycle networks including the Heritage Trail shall be included.*

Sites DH021g (South Quay), DH022g (Circular Road) and DM002 (Lake Road) are located within this treatment area, and these allocations are expected to contribute towards the Island's residential needs.

## Relevant Planning Considerations (cont....)

### Planning History

With the exceptions of the Tesco supermarket approved in 1999 (96/00634/B) and the apartment complex of Quay West (various applications), development within CTA 3 has been limited, although various planning submissions have been made in respect of the former Saw Mills Site, adjacent to the river, detailed below:

- 05/02098/B - the eastern part of the former Saw Mills site received approval for a temporary car park in 2006 (05/02098/B).
- 05/00245/A – The above approval was quickly followed in the same year for approval in principle [AIP] on the same site to replace existing buildings/yard with apartments (05/00245/A).
- PA 09/01386/B for 88 dwellings, commercial units, open space and car parking was refused in 2013, due to flooding and transport issues.

Through the 2009 application process, Highways confirmed that by widening the carriageway of Bank's Circus, removing the mini roundabout and realigning the access to the Bus Depot, vehicular issues could be addressed.

The flooding issue related to a lack of information about potential impacts to neighbouring properties, the potential dangers with the basement car parking, and a lack of hydraulic modelling. Flooding issues on the site were never resolved.

Currently (2021) the Saw Mills site remains as a temporary car park through its 2006 permission (05/02098/B)

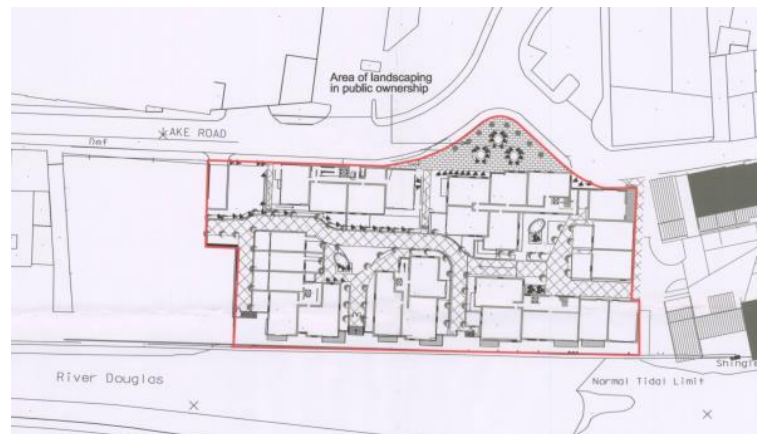


Fig. 16: Proposed Site Plan for PA 09/01386/B

### Relevant Planning Considerations (cont....)

Other notable planning applications are detailed in the table below:

Planning Application Reference	Description
97/00584/B	The transport depot was developed following this application in 1997, and has had no notable applications since.
01/01467/A	To the north of the railway track, a planning application was approved for a car park on the site opposite the Railway Yard in 2002
19/01222/B	Fronting onto Peel Road, an application was approved in 2019 for 66 local authority apartments on the site of a former car showroom.
20/01374/C	The former Drill Hall building that fronts onto Peel Road received permission in 2020 to be utilised as a retail showroom, in addition to its current use as a fireplace showroom and workspace.
07/00732/B and 06/00136/B	Following the withdrawal of a previous planning application, permission was given in 2007 for light industrial and commercial use on the Old Coal Yard site at Hills Meadow, with parking. Associated with this site, an application to extend the existing piped culvert to create a useable area was permitted in 2006.
11/01530/B	A notable approved application in 2011 proposed a pedestrian/cycle bridge across the Douglas River, connecting Lake Road and Castletown Road. This permission was never implemented and has since lapsed.

The site to the immediate west of the former Saw Mills site is the former Lake Road Depot; this site has had no notable planning applications of its own, and the site remains vacant.



## Land Ownership and Legal Tenure

The Isle of Man Government owns the tract of land through the central portion of CTA 3, (highlighted in yellow on the plan below), in which the rail way line and transport depot is to be found. Other than this, land ownership is mixed. Recent planning applications suggest that a developer owns the Site DM002g adjacent to the River, and the car park next to the supermarket is also privately owned. Land ownership and legal tenure on South Quay will be more complex.

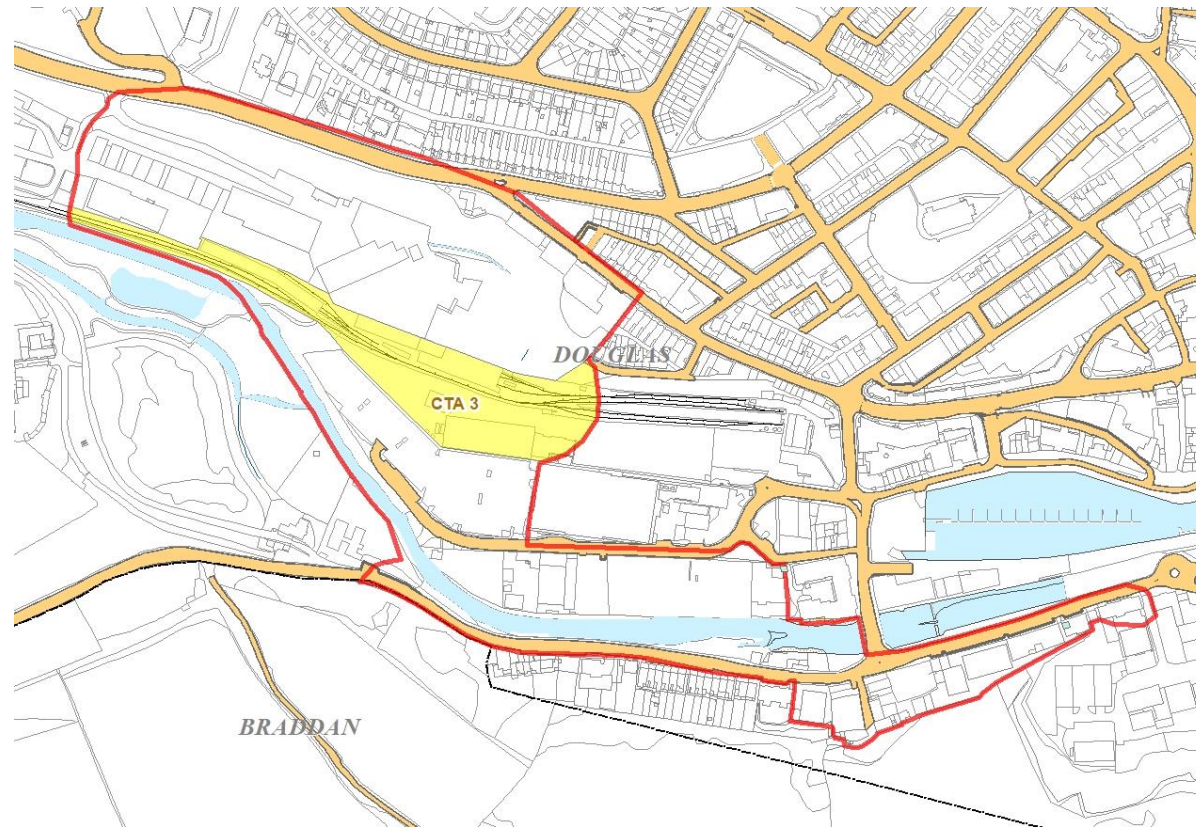


Fig. 17: Plan to show land ownership within CTA 3.

## Opportunities and Possible Outcomes

CTA 3 occupies an attractive riverside setting adjacent to the town centre. Nestled between the river and the main access into town from the west - Peel Road - the area has potential in the medium to long term for improvement, redevelopment and the possibility for better linkages and permeability. The combination of good employment options (the area is close to the primary retail and office centres), the steam railway, a supermarket, the marina and café/bar culture on North Quay, as well as an emerging leisure offer on South Quay provides a good opportunity for sustainable town centre lifestyles that can ultimately contribute to the decarbonisation agenda.

The planning policy framework supports development on previously developed sites and CTA 3 has a number of sites which can be reinvigorated and brought back into use. There are some constraints and work is still needed to ensure new schemes address the acknowledged risk posed by the proximity to the river, highway circulation and permeability for active travellers. Sensitive, well designed development can realise the goal of having a bridge over the Douglas River which would enhance the connectivity from the Nunnery Footpath along Castletown Road through the CTA to North Quay and the Promenade. Planning obligations will be explored to help secure this key link.

The designation of "CTA's" supports comprehensive development and compulsory purchase but in some cases, focused improvements such as access improvements can make a big difference to how the wider area is viewed, valued and used. Place making doesn't have to be about wholesale redevelopment. Key uses may well be retained on CTA 3 but in the longer term there is potential for bulky retail, leisure activities, residential purposes and office uses where specified. The areas of woodland that penetrate the site already provide for an attractive setting, bringing mature green infrastructure right in to the centre of town which is an asset for Douglas. This contributes significantly to the setting of the CTA, and there is a very real opportunity to extend the existing green infrastructure into the very heart of Douglas and make a valuable contribution to biodiversity net gain.

Large plot sizes offer significant investment opportunities for a mix of uses and the smaller South Quay plots are accessed on street, making these sites much more easily developable and responsive to current market demand. Lending appetites and confidence will influence how sites and new schemes move forward to implementation in a post-Covid world. A phased approach on the larger Lake Road site would help to mitigate any associated development risks.

Innovative solutions to flood risks could help to create an exciting urban quarter that includes flood alleviation measures that can accommodate active travel links to the wider rural area, and offer alternative options to vehicular transport that support healthier lifestyles.

There is an opportunity to capitalise on the historic legacy of the railway station and harbour and develop a strong design language in the area that builds upon the existing sense of place for the Riverside Gateway.

## Development Barriers to overcome

There are a number of factors that will impact upon site viability in this area:

- Site remediation will be required due to former industrial uses in this area;
- Given the growth of Douglas in the intervening period, there may be capacity issues in respect of existing utilities and infrastructure provision, and the capacity, condition and location of this infrastructure needs to be assessed, and where possible, improved upon;
- The structural soundness of retaining structures adjacent to the river may need assessing, with the possibility of re-building either in whole or in part;
- Land ownership and legal tenures;
- Land values and market demands;
- The nature of historic infill materials are currently unknown and may need remediating, given the location adjacent to the river. This may involve the removal of fill off site and new replacement fill that is inert, and
- Existing and future highways capacity issues, and the need for highways improvements, such as a new road layout or bridge crossing.

Future development areas may also be restricted due to the site topography and flood risks associated with the river flood plain, or the requirement to provide a buffer between land uses that do not sit comfortably together. Improved drainage provision may yet further constrain the developable floor plate, through sterilisation.

The river and rail track sever the area, and there is only one crossing point within CTA 3, across the Bridge on Bridge Road. Topographic level changes to the north and south further complicate access to the CTA area. If highways capacity issues can't be resolved, future land uses will need to minimise traffic generation.

Whilst recognised as an environmental asset, Registered Tree areas may constrain the establishment of crossing points in this area.

In summary, there are a number of barriers to development within this CTA, and full engagement with interested stakeholders will be required to implement development on site in the future.

## Recommendations

- A flood risk management strategy will be crucial in determining appropriate flood risk management measures that are compatible with re-development in this area.
- Early discussions with lenders and developers is recommended, to determine current lending appetites, and inform a phasing strategy for re-development in this area. Early preparation of costings and viability assessments would help to inform these discussions.
- In respect of highways capacity, early discussions with the Department of Infrastructure are recommended. In particular, an additional crossing point across the River would help to alleviate existing conflicts between pedestrians and vehicles at key movement nodes, and break up existing street lengths. Options to allow for a crossing over the railway line should also be explored.
- Future schemes for development should aim to open up views towards the historic assets associated with the woodland setting, railway and harbour, and build upon the historic legacy of this area to enhance the sense of place.
- The establishment of walled boundaries would help to screen views of service yards and car parking areas. As this area begins to regenerate, waste storage should be discretely located within schemes.
- A full assessment of drainage and utilities provision is recommended, to better understand the relevant constraints in this respect.
- An arboricultural assessment of trees adjacent to the river could help to inform future stewardship of this environmental asset and inform the best location for a future bridge link.